

## **Paternity Leave and Fathers' Involvement with Their Young Children**

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### **Abstract**

Unlike many European countries, the United States has no national paternity leave policy giving fathers the right to take paid time off work following the birth (or adoption) of a child. Despite this, prior research suggests that many fathers do take some time off work after a child is born. However, little is known about the determinants, circumstances, or consequences of paternal leave-taking. In this paper, we use the first two waves of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), a new nationally representative panel study of over 10,000 children born in 2001, to examine these questions. The ECLS-B is uniquely suited for these analyses because it includes a battery of questions about a broad range of activities in which fathers can participate with their children and these questions are asked directly of the father. Additionally, the ECLS-B contains a rich set of other measures about the father, mother and child and the family's socioeconomic circumstances.

First, we describe how much leave fathers are taking and which characteristics of the father, mother, and child are associated with the likelihood of taking paternity leave and with the length of leave. Next, we examine the extent to which leave-taking and the amount of leave taken are associated with fathers' involvement with their children when they are approximately nine months old. Based on preliminary work, we find that the overwhelming majority of fathers take at least some leave at the birth of their child, but that the length of that leave varies a good deal. Our results also indicate that fathers who take longer leaves are more involved in child care-taking activities nine months later. However, we cannot establish causality between leave-taking and subsequent father involvement because of the possibility that unobserved characteristics of fathers are driving these results. In subsequent analyses, we employ a number of analytical techniques, such as propensity score matching and instrumental variables in an attempt to reduce the potential bias of our estimates. Additionally, we examine longer-run and more varied indicators of father involvement from the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of the ECLS-B data, collected when the children were two years old.